

How to Help to Ease Trauma When Giving Up a Pet

Above all, the human-animal bond reigns, even when an owner is forced to relinquish a pet. Most people love their pets and want to make sure the next transition is a positive one for all. Here's how one individual is making a difference and avoiding the shelter system whenever possible.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Today's Pet Game Changer is Mandy Evans, executive director of the Better Together Animal Alliance of northern Idaho, which features the innovative and fast-growing Home To Home direct home placement program
- The mission of Home To Home is to honor the human-animal bond, the love people have for their pets, and the value of keeping families together, or when necessary, avoiding a shelter stay by moving animals from one home directly to a new home

My guest today is Mandy Evans, who was nominated for a Game Changer award by Gayle H. Mandy is the executive director of the Better Together Animal Alliance (BTAA), an organization dedicated to serving the animals of northern Idaho. BTAA programs, including Home To Home, are focused on keeping families together so that as few pets as possible wind up in shelters.

Mandy and her team believe that "though sheltering is still part of our services, we want sheltering to be a small part of what we do because our work keeps families together."

Paralyzed Pug Changes the Direction of Her Life

To kick off our chat, I asked Mandy to tell us what inspired and fueled her passion for the amazing work she does getting animals into safe homes without going through the shelter system.

"I've always been an animal lover from the time that I was a baby, actually," Mandy explains. "My mom has three girls and she bought us each little figurines when we were babies and mine had a dog in it. A pivotal moment for me was when I was in my 20s and my cat, Caviar, passed away from cancer.

I wanted another pet, and I had always wanted a Pug. So, I bought one from a breeder. It was the first time I'd done anything like that. Then I found out my Pug had a malformed spine. She became paralyzed about three weeks after I got her.

The experience of having that little dog changed my life. I was completely dedicated to her. We visited elementary schools to talk to the kids about how to approach and talk to people who are different from them. The experience put my life on a new course.

I left corporate America and started to spend most of my time helping others and eventually it led me to my current passion, which is running an animal welfare organization."

Building Bridges From Home to Home

Ultimately, Mandy moved from California northern Idaho.

"I heard of an opening at our local animal shelter," she continues. "I applied and was selected. It was eye-opening, a completely different world. That's what I experienced with animal welfare. It's really a science. You learn how to properly house and move animals through a system.

One of the most important lessons I learned is that animal welfare is not about animals. I mean, our job is to ensure that animals are cared for, but it's really about relationships and people. It's about supporting the human-animal bond, which is absolutely essential to what we do.

That's how our Home To Home program was born. We saw the challenges of people who were forced to surrender their pets and how willing people were to shame others for the situations they were in. What ends up happening is the response to these situations tends to diminish the human-animal bond and treat it very transactionally. But that's not what's happening on the other end.

What's happening on the other end is somebody having to make a really difficult decision that is based on life circumstances, or on the health and welfare and what's best for the pet. We wanted to create something that really honored the human-animal bond, and the love people have for their pets, wanting to ensure the next transition is a positive one for their pet."

I asked Mandy how she came up with a system designed to bring the least amount of stress to all parties involved when a pet must be relinquished. She explained that her best ideas come to her in the shower, and this one was no exception!

"I'm one of those people with a lot of tenacity," she says. "I don't give up. I went out and sought funding. We created a platform specifically for our local community. Once we were able to get it up and running, we saw a 33% reduction in owner surrenders to our shelter, which was huge. I was afraid our community wouldn't accept the concept because they villainized people for needing to surrender their pets.

So, they might think, 'How dare you support people who are surrendering or re-homing their pets?' But it was quite the opposite. People loved the idea. We received so much positive feedback that we then went out looking for more funding support and converted the platform from local to national."

Home to Home Continues to Grow and Expand

The Home To Home program now operates throughout North America. Mandy's organization partners with over 120 shelters who use the platform. The program is also available to anyone who needs help re-homing their pet. They can go to the website and create a pet profile that will be shared within their community and to a wider area.

Potential pet parents reach out to owners directly to determine whether they might be a good fit for the animal. If it seems like a good match, the pet goes from one home to another, with no in-between stay at a shelter.

In 2020, Home To Home expanded even further to help people who were facing eviction. People in those situations can seek a foster home for their pet from community members who've signed up as fosters. The concept is also now being applied in disaster management, such as during Hurricane Ian. People signed up to foster pets of families impacted by the storm.

"We're at the point now where we know the concept works," Mandy explains. "We have around 7,000 fosters signed up on the site, ready and willing to help pet owners who need a temporary home for their animal."

Keeping Families Together

Mandy explains that the mission of Home To Home isn't really so much about re-homing, but about providing people with resources to help them keep their pets.

"What we've learned is that if we can provide just a buffer of time, many people figure out a way to keep their pet," she says.

As far as measuring their success, Mandy and her team believe that every pet who isn't surrendered to a shelter, isn't euthanized or otherwise passes away, but either stays with their owner, or is rehomed with a friend, family member, or other adopter, is a big success. I asked Mandy what motivates her most when she gets up each morning.

"Honestly, I think what really drives me is this idea that we don't trust our neighbors anymore," she replies. "I'd like the Home To Home platform to be just a little spot of positivity in the world where people can come and we can say, 'We trust you and believe in you. We trust you to make a good decision about where your pet should go and that we don't need to get involved."

Just because we work in animal welfare doesn't make us the moral kings and queens and the best decision makers in the world. We think you are the best decision maker for your pet. And I really love that we can kind of go out and try to help people see this. So that's kind of what drives me."

If you'd like to learn more about Mandy's organization, you can visit the [**Better Together Animal Alliance**](#) ([Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)) as well as the [**Home To Home**](#) site ([Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)). You can also email them at [**info@home-home.org**](mailto:info@home-home.org) and expect a personal response.

Finally, I asked Mandy what one thing she would share with the world if she had the opportunity.

"Fear is used as a tool to manipulate and control us," she replies. "What I've learned is that people are people, and we all want many of the same things. We're being programmed to fear each other, but really, our neighbors and the people in our communities are pretty amazing!"